



CONNECTICUT IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COALITION

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CIRC is a broad-based network of community agencies, religious groups, legal service providers and immigrant rights activists committed to protecting the rights and welfare of refugee and immigrant communities in the state

Testimony of Robert J. Fishman to the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement on behalf of the Jewish Federation Association of Connecticut (JFACT) and the Connecticut Immigrant and Refugee Coalition (CIRC)

**In support of House Bill 6390
March 15, 2011**

Co-Chair Rep. Roberta Willis and Co-Chair Beth Bye, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, I am Robert J. Fishman, President of the CT Immigrant and Refugee Coalition and the Executive Director of JFACT (Jewish Federation Assoc. of Ct.) Both of our boards of directors heartily support HB. 6390, An Act Concerning Access to Post Secondary Education, which will provide in-state tuition to Connecticut high school graduates who are undocumented and were brought to the United States by their parents.

Currently, Federal law states we should educate these children in our public schools through High School but is silent on post-secondary education. President Obama called for passage of the Dream Act in his recent State of the Union Address. The Dream Act would provide a legal pathway to citizenship for these students. Congress does not show the will or courage to enact legislation to assist these well-meaning children numbering about 65,000 across the U.S. In Connecticut, our flagship University of Connecticut has verified that it averages 2 students a year who fall into the category of undocumented immigrant youth who have spent at least 4 years in the Connecticut school system. Currently, these 2 students are paying out of state tuition and allowing them to pay in-state tuition will not change the percentage of tuition rates at UConn, which are 70% in-state and 30% out of state. Experience in the states that have passed in-state tuition bills suggests that such legislation does not deprive the states of the revenue from large numbers of students who would otherwise pay out-of-state tuition. Rather, it raises the percentage of high school graduates who pursue a college degree.

In the case of other schools in our State system, it is believed about another 65 or so would also benefit from in-state tuition and some others may feel more comfortable enrolling as they and their families can afford the lower costs of tuition. Do we really want to penalize this relatively small number of students from pursuing their dreams? We do know that immigrant children

whether documented or not, tend to stay in the state as they want to remain close to their families. These young immigrants are key to our ability to counteract the serious demographic challenges we face. We must raise the caliber of our work force through higher education to have a chance to maintain a strong economy. Each person who can attend college and obtain a professional job means one less drain on the social service budget of the state and an asset in terms of payment of taxes and the attraction to our state of high-wage employers seeking well-educated workers. Currently, only about 5 to 10 percent of undocumented youth who graduate from high school go on to college, compared with about 75 percent of their classmates, primarily because of the burden of financing their educations (National Immigrant Law Center, 2010).

For those who would support this initiative but still remain skeptical about how these students can ultimately become citizens, please realize that in addition to the changes that will come with Federal Immigration Reform, these young people will meet citizens in college and some will marry Americans, therefore making them eligible for naturalization.

The following 10 states have already passed similar legislation for in-state tuition – California, Texas, Utah, New York, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Illinois, Washington and Nebraska. Maryland and Colorado are currently considering it. This bill is legal and does not violate federal law in any way. Courts have rejected challenges to similar bills enacted in other states.

We urge the committee to pass HB 6390 in order to give deserving Connecticut youth a chance to realize their dreams of higher education and a brighter future.